



**UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY
REGION 8**

1595 Wynkoop Street
DENVER, CO 80202-1129
Phone 800-227-8917
<http://www.epa.gov/region08>

July 20, 2011

Ref: EPR-SR

The Honorable Denny Rehberg
United States Representative
2448 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressman Rehberg:

Thank you for your letter of July 6, 2011, regarding the recent newspaper article on asbestos in the wood chip piles located at the former Stimson Mill property in Libby, Montana. On behalf of EPA Administrator Lisa Jackson, I would like to take this opportunity to respond to your concerns. This Administration has taken the unprecedented step of declaring a public health emergency under law and invested almost \$400 million public dollars to clean up the town thus far. The EPA will not walk away from the people of Libby. We are here for the duration to deal with issues, large and small, in a transparent, science based and open manner. This EPA will honor its commitment to the people of Libby. Following are the EPA's responses to the questions presented in your letter:

1. On which date(s) in 2007 were the initial tests at the mill site conducted?

EPA Response: The EPA collected samples in October 2007 from the wood chips at the Stimson Mill property. Asbestos was detected in 4 of 20 samples analyzed, but activity based sampling (ABS) on workers and equipment operators on and near the wood chip piles indicated no asbestos exposure in personal air monitoring data. The EPA published the data in "The Libby Asbestos Site OU5 Final Sampling Summary Report 2007 Investigations", dated July 25, 2008. The EPA made this report available at the Libby information center in August 2008.

2. When did EPA become aware of the contaminated wood piles at the mill?

EPA Response: As previously stated, the EPA tested the wood chip pile in October 2007 and made the results publicly available in 2008. While asbestos was detected in 4 of 20 samples analyzed, activity based sampling (ABS) on workers and equipment operators on and near the wood chip piles did not detect asbestos in personal air monitoring data.

3. The agency promised secondary tests at the mill site to determine the exact health risks. While these levels were recently measured at the mine site, they have not been measured at the mill.

How much asbestos is contained in the wood piles at the mill site, and what threat does this pose to the health of Libby's residents?

EPA Response: When the EPA sampled the wood chips in 2007, the available analytical methods did not allow us to quantify the number of asbestos fibers present. This summer, we plan to re-analyze some of those samples using a method that can quantify the level of asbestos. In 2007 the ABS detected no asbestos in the personal air monitoring of workers and equipment operators. The EPA concluded there was no asbestos exposure to the workers. Workers are expected to have greater contact time with larger quantities of wood chips than individual homeowners and so the likelihood of workers being exposed to contamination is expected to be higher. Thus the fact that the worker ABS results showed no detectable exposure to asbestos is reassuring regarding potential homeowner exposure. This summer, we will do additional ABS studies to evaluate homeowner exposure. The recent development of the draft Libby amphibole specific asbestos cancer and non-cancer toxicity factors in concert with community concern has prompted the EPA to reevaluate the wood chips. The EPA recommended to the Kootenai River Development Council (KRDC) in a March 25, 2011, letter and in subsequent conversations, that the wood chip material not be sold until we have more information. Our understanding is that KRDC accepted this recommendation. We are moving ahead to complete toxicology assessments for both cancer and non-cancer health effects, which will allow us to complete a risk assessment for the site.

4. EPA has prohibited timber harvests within an eight-mile radius of the mine site. Why, then, was contaminated wood processed at the mill? Is it possible that the wood originated within the aforementioned radius?

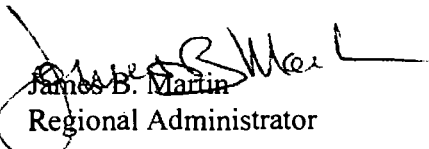
EPA Response: While the EPA has not prohibited timber harvests anywhere on the site, the US Forest Service and various private landowners have suspended timber harvests based on their own concerns. The Stimson Mill ceased operations prior to 1999, when the EPA first became involved in asbestos cleanup Libby. In May and June 2011, as a conservative measure, the EPA placed notices in the local newspaper advising citizens to avoid collecting firewood in areas in the Libby valley where tree bark and forest duff may contain asbestos fibers.

5. If not, will your agency take steps to better map the surrounding forestland to determine asbestos levels outside of the eight-mile radius?

EPA Response: The EPA has collected samples of forest duff and tree bark up to eight miles from the mine site. The analysis of these samples indicates that asbestos levels drop off dramatically at or before the eight mile distance from the mine site. Based on this data, we have no plans at this time to sample beyond eight miles.

We appreciate your continued interest in the EPA's clean-up actions in Libby. If you have further questions regarding the EPA's cleanup in Libby, please contact me. Your staff may wish to contact Sandy Fells, Regional Congressional Liaison, at 303-312-6604 or fells.sandy@epa.gov.

Sincerely,


James B. Martin
Regional Administrator

